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AN ALGONQUIN SYLLABARY

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AN ALGONQUIN SYLLABARY.

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A CURSIVE style of writing by means of syllabic symbols is employed by the Sauk, Fox, and Kickapoo for purposes of record and communication. Most of the Sauk are in eastern Oklahoma; nearly all the Fox are in central Iowa; and the Kickapoo are to be found in central Oklahoma, in eastern Kansas, and over the Texas border in Mexico. All three are Algonquin; and their dialects are so intimately akin, that it is little or no difficulty for them to understand one another; and back and forth with one another they correspond by means of letters written in the phonetic signs of the syllabary.

The general appearance of the symbols of the syllabary is not very unlike cursive, Roman characters. The symbols represent four vowels and eleven consonants. The value of each symbol is collective; that is to say, the sign of a vowel represents a group of related vowel-sounds, and it stands for either a short or a long quantity, and the sign of a consonant may include more than one variation of a certain place of articulation. These points will come out plainly in the description of the symbols. The first to come are the vowels, and they are given with approximate English correspondences.

æ or *Æ* is like *a* in *what*, or like *a* in *all*, or like the vowel-sound in *hut*. The regular place for *æ* is within the word or at the end of it, and *Æ* always occupies initial position.

e is like *e* in *let*, or *a* in *late*, or like *a* in *alley*.

i is like the short *i* in *it*, like the long vowel-sound in *see*.

o is like the short *o* in *fellow*, or like the short *u* in *full*, or like the long *o* in *rose*, or like the long vowel-sound in *loon*.

There is no sign to indicate a diphthong. When the double sound is encountered, the sign of the first vowel is used.

In the description of the signs of the consonants, it may prove simpler to give the signs with approximate English equivalents, and afterwards to point out some of the various articulations which a part of them represent. The signs of the consonants are —

<i>ℓ</i> , like <i>p</i> in <i>pen</i> .	<i>u</i> , like <i>w</i> in <i>we</i> .
<i>ʃ</i> , “ <i>t</i> in <i>ten</i> .	<i>m</i> , “ <i>m</i> in <i>me</i> .
“ <i>s</i> in <i>see</i> .	<i>n</i> , “ <i>n</i> in <i>no</i> .
<i>d</i> , “ <i>sh</i> in <i>she</i> .	<i>κ</i> , “ <i>k</i> in <i>kill</i> .
<i>ʈ</i> , “ <i>ch</i> in <i>church</i> .	<i>ʒ</i> , “ <i>q</i> in <i>quit</i> .
<i>ʝ</i> , “ <i>y</i> in <i>you</i> .	

There are at least three slightly different articulations with each of the consonants *ℓ*, *ʃ*, and *κ*; *ℓ* may be almost like the sonant *b* in *bun*; or most often it may be like *p* in *pit*; and it may be a bilabial stop preceded by a whispered continuant before articulation. In the same way, *ʃ* may be nearly like *d* in *day*, or like the voiceless *t* in *ten*; it may also represent a dental stop preceded by a gentle puff of breath. And so with *κ*, the sign can be for a stop nearly like the sonant *g* in *gun*, or like the *k* in *kill*; as in the case of the other two consonants, it may represent a stop preceded by a hiss of breath.

There is no sign for the very common aspirate *h*.

It will thus be observed that the syllabary lacks in two very important features: it is weak in its range of expression, and it wants in delicate gradation of sound.

It is common to associate the consonants in combination with vowels; and in learning the syllabary, the vowels are told off first, and afterwards the consonants in combination with the vowels. The order followed is not vowel and then each consonant one after the other with that vowel, but first all the vowels, and then one consonant at a time in connection with all the four vowels. The order of the symbols is usually as follows.

<i>u</i> <i>A</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>o</i>
<i>lu</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>lo</i>
<i>tu</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>to</i>
<i>su</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>so</i>
<i>du</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>do</i>
<i>tu</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>to</i>
<i>Iu</i>	<i>Ie</i>	<i>Ii</i>	<i>Io</i>
<i>wu</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>wi</i>	<i>wo</i>
<i>mu</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mo</i>
<i>nu</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>no</i>
<i>Ku</i>	<i>Ke</i>	<i>Ki</i>	<i>Ko</i>
<i>Su</i>	<i>Se</i>	<i>Si</i>	<i>So</i>

The symbols are sometimes modified for hidden motives. A simple form of the modification occurs with change of vowel only: in this change there is no sign for *u* or *A*; a low dot (.) represents *e*, a raised dot (·) stands for *i*; and two low dots (..) are for *o*. In this slightly altered form, the syllabary then appears as follows:—

<i>l</i>	<i>l.</i>	<i>l[·]</i>	<i>l^{··}</i>
<i>t</i>	<i>t.</i>	<i>t[·]</i>	<i>t^{··}</i>
<i>s</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>s[·]</i>	<i>s^{··}</i>
<i>d</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>d[·]</i>	<i>d^{··}</i>
<i>tt</i>	<i>tt.</i>	<i>tt[·]</i>	<i>tt^{··}</i>
<i>I</i>	<i>I.</i>	<i>I[·]</i>	<i>I^{··}</i>
<i>w</i>	<i>w.</i>	<i>w[·]</i>	<i>w^{··}</i>
<i>m</i>	<i>m.</i>	<i>m[·]</i>	<i>m^{··}</i>
<i>n</i>	<i>n.</i>	<i>n[·]</i>	<i>n^{··}</i>
<i>K</i>	<i>K.</i>	<i>K[·]</i>	<i>K^{··}</i>
<i>S</i>	<i>S.</i>	<i>S[·]</i>	<i>S^{··}</i>

A much wider modification occurs with complete alteration of both vowel and consonant. In the vowels, *u* and *A* become *x*, *e* becomes *h*, *i* becomes *hh*, *o* becomes *hhh*. In the conso-

nants, *ℓ* becomes +, *ʃ* becomes C, *ʌ* becomes Q, *ɔ* becomes i, *ʒ* becomes n, *ʒ* becomes =, *u* becomes 22, *m* becomes H, *n* becomes #, *k* becomes C', and *ʒ* becomes 2C. The syllabary then takes on this form:—

x	h	th	hh
+x	+h	+th	+hhh
Cx	Ch	Cth	Chh
Qx	Qh	Qth	Qhh
ℓx	ℓh	ℓth	ℓhh
ⁿ x	ⁿ h	ⁿ th	ⁿ hh
=x	=h	=th	=hh
22x	22h	22th	22hh
Hx	Hh	Hth	Hhh
#x	#h	#th	#hh
C'x	C'h	C'th	C'hh
2Cx	2Ch	2Cth	2Chh

This is a rather brief description of the phonetics of the syllabary, but perhaps ample enough for a clear understanding of its general character. The working of the syllabary can rapidly be shown in the same brief manner; and it can best be exemplified by means of a text. It will there be observed that there are no marks indicating accent, and that there are only four signs for punctuation: the period (.), the short dash (—), the multiplication-sign (×), or the plus-sign (+). The period or the dash separates words and word-sentences, and the multiplication-sign or the plus-sign marks the end of sentences.

The text is a short historical fragment. It fits into a familiar legend known to most southern Algonquin,—a legend that refers to a time when it was believed that all the Algonquin were one people and together. The incident here recited is given with the symbols of the regular form of the syllabary and in the dialect of the Fox; and an interlinear translation follows with it.

me ko te nui li. A da wa I e. me dya ki a ki
 It was once on a time they say long ago Red-Earth (people)

o dki na we a ki. e di da wa tti. e ma wi ne la wa tti x
 they that were young they went to to a place where they
 in growth hunt for game went to pass the night out.

ima ga ne ne sa wa tti x i ni li. A ne tu. e la ka to wa tti
 A bear there they killed. The story is part of them they boiled it
 told that

ma ho si ta ni x ki de sa mo wa tti. e ta ka ta mo wa tti x
 the bear foot; after they had finished they then ate it all up.
 cooking it,

i ni ke de no tti ke. e I e I a wa tti.
 They that were absent when they came back,

e ki di tti I e to ke tti ka ta mi ni te e. ma ho si ta ni x
 was by that time lo they must have eaten it all up the bear foot.

i ne me ta we wa tti. e la ke wa tti x i ni ki tti. i ni ki.
 Thereupon they sulked, then they separated. They truly they

ma ho si ta ni. me ta wa tti ki. e ne tti ki x
 bear foot they that sulked such are they called.

e ta na tti me tti. i li. e a wi wa tti.
 Stories are told of them; it is said that where they are

e a ga na ki se ki. me de si lowi. A do wa ki we x
 at the end of the place where the big river. Over the high land.

i ni ki tti i. ma ho si ta ni. me ta wa tti ki x
 they are bear foot they that sulked.

A rather free rendering of the tale reads as follows: —

It is said that once on a time long ago some youths of the Red-Earths (Foxes) started on a hunt for game, and went to a place where

they were to be out over night. There they slew a bear. It is said that some of them boiled a foot of the bear; and after they had finished cooking it, they then ate it up. Now, when they that were absent came back, lo, by that time the bear-foot must have been eaten up.

Thereupon they (who came late) sulked, and so parted company (from the others). They truly are the ones that are called They-who-sulked-on-Account-of-the-Bear-Foot. Stories are told of them; it is said that they now are on the other side of the height of land where the source of the Mississippi River is. They are the Bear-Foot Sulkers.

A syllabary was in use among some Algonquin at a very early period. One was used by Eliot at Natick in his missionary labors with that Massachusetts dialect; another was used by LaCombe and other Jesuit missionaries in their work among the Ojibwa and the Cree of Canada. The syllabary employed by Eliot was in Roman letters, and the one used by LaCombe and others was and still is in what are called "Cree characters."

The adoption of the syllabary by the Sauk, Fox, and Kickapoo is of very recent date. It is not certain at present which of these dialects was the first to take it up; but the one that was the first to learn it no doubt quickly taught it to the other two. It seems pretty certain, also, that the system was deliberately borrowed from an outside source, most likely from an Algonquin people that had had experience with the writings of Christian missionaries. It shows no trace of development from the old figurative representations, realistic or conventional, to the phonetic scale. The old form of writing is rarely practised these days, and the jump from the old to the new must have been sudden. The syllabary is in general use among the younger people and by a limited number of the more elderly. Boys and girls handle it with more ease and speed than the older folk.

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